

July 17, 1961

**Memorandum of Conversation between Director
Zhang Wenji and Indian Ambassador Parthasarathy
(2)**

Citation:

"Memorandum of Conversation between Director Zhang Wenji and Indian Ambassador Parthasarathy (2)", July 17, 1961, Wilson Center Digital Archive, PRC FMA 105-01056-03, 60-66. Obtained by Sulmaan Khan and translated by Anna Beth Keim.
<https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/121626>

Summary:

Zhang Wenji and Parthasarathy discuss how to best solve the differences of opinion on the Sino-Indian border held between China and India. Zhang and Parthasarathy discuss different methods and approaches, including a re-examination of historical facts around the Sino-Indian border, focusing on larger patterns and issues, and an emphasis on more detailed and current issues.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from MacArthur Foundation

Original Language:

Chinese

Contents:

Translation - English

Memorandum of Conversation (2): Director Zhang Wenji and Indian Ambassador Parthasarathy

Time: 17 July 1961, 4-7 p.m.

Location: Shanghai Peace Hotel

Parthasarathy: This morning we spoke about that when the two sides have sharp differences of opinion, one method is to place the reports to one side and ignore them, while both sides proceed from a political angle to reconsider [the issues]. Another method is one that the foreign secretary mentioned yesterday, that is, both sides determine which points [we] do and don't agree on, as well as which ones require clarification, [then] look at how we might lessen our differences of opinion. My impression is that it would be relatively difficult to lessen our differences of opinion using the officials' reports as a foundation. But seeing as both sides are basically willing [to talk], then what should we do in terms of procedure? Yesterday the foreign secretary mentioned both sides reconsidering [the issues].

Zhang: What we talked about this morning was just the proposal, [drawn] from the practical experience of China's border negotiations with Burma and Nepal, that there are two possible methods for solving differences of opinion. These are both meant to address specific problems. For example, both sides present a factual basis regarding a certain [land] area; under these circumstances, they can objectively compare them, looking to see whose information is relatively more logical and more beneficial to the two countries' friendship. Speaking in terms of the Sino-Indian border, in the east, the region between the traditional Sino-Indian line and the McMahon Line has always been a part of China's Tibet. But the jurisdiction situation is not exactly the same throughout the area. In the area to the south, due to incursions by British forces, [British] influence also came in, and it was only after this that [the area's] relations with India grew closer. The area to the north, on the other hand, has always maintained relations with Tibet. There are differences between the eastern and western parts, too: [in] Tibet, for example in the Monyul region, control is more established; in certain other areas it may not be so well—established. It was only in the end that India completely occupied [the area] south of the McMahon line; those are the facts.

Parthasarathy: When you say the southern area is close with India, are you referring to administrative jurisdiction or the cultural relationship? I think you must be referring to administrative jurisdiction.

Zhang: Generally speaking, a few years ago there wasn't a modern political administration at all. Of course, what we are concerned with today is not cultural or racial relationships, it is administration and politics. We have persistently advocated considering historical background and the practical situation in seeking ways to solve the problem; with respect to the western area, it goes without saying [that] is under Chinese jurisdiction. Historically, only a few British people have been there—in the capacity of tourists, businessmen, officials, and explorers. Of course, one cannot say that China's jurisdiction [over the area] is completely modern administration; hardly anybody resides in this place. On this issue, India has a different view, and made mention of some situations. But it is very clear that other than a small number of Westerners and hired Indians who have occasionally gone there, especially in the last several decades, this region has been under China's considerably effective control. The ambassador, of course, will not agree on this point; that being the case, we can do a comparison to see whose [version] makes more sense based on the historical background and actual situation. If both sides take the approach of friendly problem-solving, dealing objectively with the facts, the issues can be resolved. For example, the Pianma region on the Sino-Burmese border has been under British-Burmese control for 50 long years; Britain used armed force to occupy this spot. But prior to those 50 years, this spot was always China's. The Chinese side says it belongs to China, the Burmese side says it belongs to Burma. Of course, this place

has already been under British-Burmese control for 50 years; the Burmese side also has some grounds [for its position]. But we must thank the Burmese side, because Burma says this was occupied by Britain, and for fairness' sake it is willing to return it to China. The secondary issue is just how large Pianma is; in this we can adopt an objective approach and have friendly consultations, [each] forgiving and yielding to the other.

Parthasarathy: There is a problem of compatibility on this issue. It's not that I'm belittling the significance of that affair; it's that the disagreements over the Sino-Indian border are much greater. Of course, there are some aspects [of that affair] we can take for reference. Like with Tamaden—if we discover that it's located south of the line, we'll pull out of our own accord.

Zhang: There's no question of compatibility with the Pianma issue; the compatibility is in other areas. I don't want to discuss details. It's true that the Sino-Indian border issue touches on problems much larger than Pianma, but Pianma is not only a point like Tamaden, it's a region. The way we handle issues is the same—a Chinese proverb says, "Small as the sparrow is, it has a complete set of vital organs." Large problems carry more difficulties; this makes it even more necessary for the leaders and parties concerned to handle [issues] with foresight and courage. After all, this is not a temporary question but a long-term one, touching on both sides' interests and destiny for many, many years [to come]; both sides hope to solve the matter once and for all. The aforementioned is one type [of problem resolution], with both sides disagreeing on the details and finally reaching a consensus. Another type is that both sides stick to their own views: not giving an inch, unable to come together, because it touches [on each one's] sense of dignity. Given the impossibility of reaching a consensus on the facts, in these circumstances, as a last resort one might consider seeking resolution in view of the political and practical [circumstances]. Of course, it is better to use the first method. The second method is a last resort. There may also be other methods besides these. Just requiring that one side admit fault, forcing one's own will on the other, would never work. It doesn't work with small countries, much less large ones. Yet another method is to leave off resolution for the time being, both sides ensuring that there is peace along the border and that no clashes occur. Both sides express a steadfast willingness to be friendly, and to take each other's opinions into consideration to seek peaceful methods of resolution. Even if the border issues aren't actually resolved, both sides can still interact in a peaceful and friendly way. Many countries across the world have borders that are not yet fixed, but [they] are still able to interact harmoniously, both sides waiting to talk again when the opportunity and conditions are ripe. This is my personal opinion, and has not been authorized in any way.

Parthasarathy: Our view is that your control of Ladakh is a very recent thing. It only just happened in 1955 and 1959; thus Indian newspapers say it was recently invaded. Perhaps [we] can consider using the second method, with each side keeping its own views, and resolving issues by facing realities and making compromises. But the difficulty lies in swaying popular opinion. I hear that it also took quite a long time for you and Burma to resolve border issues, and that [resolution] involved the method of retreat, [which] created a good atmosphere. Here are the facts; we have to consider them. I cannot think of another way to overcome this political obstacle other than making a big gesture, expressing sincerity. This is a method I once thought of, and I'm not prepared to report it to the government. As to the first method—that is, the two sides reexamining the historical facts and practical situation—while it a very good method, I don't know what you think of this method's likelihood of success, having participated in the official meetings. I am certainly not saying this to criticize things past, but mainly with an eye to the future; I feel that in the official meetings, both sides only voiced their most extreme positions.

Zhang: I very much appreciate the ambassador's last remark.

(1) Concerning the so-called Ladakh problem, this is a problem of the western section. As I understand it, Prime Minister Nehru discussed [the issue] with Premier Zhou last year in Delhi, and admitted that a number of years ago the northern part of this area was under China's control. The most obvious fact [supporting this] is that we built a highway through this region. Prime Minister Nehru also said that China's advances were mainly in the southern part of this region, the Kongka Pass region. As for the eastern section, we also based ourselves on the facts; there is a considerable part of the region that India has controlled somewhat longer, but there is also a part close to the McMahon Line that India only entered in the last year or two. India says the Indian side has some difficulties it has to take care of, but we also have difficulties—both sides must consider taking care of [the difficulties]; it is only in this way that problems can be easily solved.

(2) It is worth considering the question of whether the official meeting style is appropriate for carrying out future work. At the time they stipulated tasks, the premiers of both countries were thinking in light of the wish to resolve the issues as quickly as possible. Both sides worked hard, but the differences of opinion are great. There is one point [we have] in common, which is that these most recent official meetings were the most tension—filled instance of work for both sides. The situation at that time, especially in the Delhi phase, was that both presented a vast amount of [written] information that the other had to comment on immediately. Both sides were mainly limited to defending their own positions. This style, in my personal opinion, is not very beneficial for resolving issues. Based on my experience participating in some of the work of the Sino-Burmese negotiations, when it comes to checking the actual information, the key does not lie with presenting a vast amount of information, but with whether one can, to a greater degree, consider the main issue from a position of foresight and come closer together [on the facts]. After the main issue is resolved, the lesser issues are also readily resolved. With the Sino-Burmese border, it was both sides' retreat and not a single-sided retreat that had a definite effect in terms of improving the atmosphere. This reflected the two sides' approach of forgiving and yielding to each other, taking care of both sides and facing the facts. China agreed to withdraw from the Panhung-Panlao [tribal] area, Burma agreed to withdraw from the Pianma area. This increased mutual trust, and the friendly feelings of the people. Our side imagined something similar for India; when Sino-Indian relations were tense, we thereby suggested that both sides withdraw 20 kilometers. The Indian side has not agreed, so it has not been achievable. No matter what the considerations, now they can all be raised and explored. Anything that takes appropriate care of both sides and is based on reciprocity can be considered. Both sides must also consider how to progress yet further. One could also say that the Chinese side has comparatively lesser difficulties, but difficulties do in fact exist—difficulties are not necessarily expressed in media opinions. During the Sino-Burmese border negotiations, there were differing opinions within China, especially between Yunnan's local border peoples and upper—class circles—the pressure was considerable. But we didn't let it leak out; we adopted a consultation style to conduct the work of convincing [people]. It is my personal opinion that both sides should consider what specific methods there are to push things forward. We [Chinese] are currently considering this, and welcome friends, including the ambassador himself, to do so. As long as it's helpful in advancing Sino-Indian relations, no matter whether you do so as the ambassador or as a friend, we welcome you to bring it up.

Parthasarathy: I would like to clarify one point. In the case of the second method, if the facts presented by the two sides are that different, what is it that the two retain? Can [we] think of it as, no one has to abandon their position, but just make concessions in a broader political sense?

Zhang: It can be understood this way. It's not necessary to speak of which side was wrong in the past; this is an issue of mutual concessions.

Parthasarathy: Your difficulties probably are fewer: your legislative assembly is not as

heated as ours. Following along with this assumption, the Indian side could say, India has sovereignty over Aksai Chin, but agrees to China having a highway there. This is hypothetical, just a reflection of the Indian people's ideas. But the Indian people still have one misgiving. The fifth point in Premier Zhou's proposed six points of consensus is that both sides maintain the status quo, without territorial demands as the prerequisite. Some Indians fear that if we agree to this point, it means we agree that China has sovereignty over Aksai Chin.

Zhang: Let me clarify a moment: The fifth point in Premier Zhou's proposed six points of consensus refers to both sides keeping to the actual line of control, and not making the other's acceptance of one's own territorial demands a prerequisite for conducting negotiations. Maintaining the status quo and the final resolution are still two different things.

Parthsarathy: I agree with this understanding, otherwise there would be no room for negotiation. But in India there is the view that what Premier Zhou meant was to resolve the issues on the basis of the status quo, because the original language also mentioned: "But individual adjustments can be made."

Zhang: Individual adjustments are also in regard to maintaining the status quo. [We] have to separate maintaining the status quo from the final resolution.

Also, it seems that the two countries' other disputes can be reduced somewhat. There are some small matters that often recur in our exchanges of [diplomatic] letters. We didn't answer some letters out of the consideration that we shouldn't go looking for trouble on some small matters. It's better to have fewer letter exchanges; we can talk informally about important things and only then present letters [to each other]. Otherwise it increases fervor on both sides, for nothing. [We] hope that both sides can have a certain understanding and make allowances on this point, otherwise the two sides will have certain jealous suspicions, thinking the other one is up to something and taking [the other's] lack of reply as silent confirmation of this; in the future this can't be reversed. For several years, India has adopted a practice of all letters having to be answered, and India having to be the one to draw up a conclusion. India also issued a white paper many times; with so many protests by India, we could not but also raise protests and answer back on some questions. Please consider whether some practices can be changed in future. For example, in the matter of English versions of the reports from the two countries' government officials, it was initially decided that translations would not be provided for either side's report. Later the Indian side insisted that [China] provide an English version, and the Chinese side agreed. Due to the narrow time constraints, there were some places in the translated version that were not precise enough, and we later made some non-substantive corrections to it. Recently the Indian foreign ministry sent a letter saying that the translated version had different implications from the original, and India could not accept it. This surprised us, because there is no question of accepting or not accepting with the translation—both sides take the text proper as the standard. Otherwise, we too would require India to provide translations of documents, and also be pickier about them.